

Response to Manomet Study

When my father and uncle started our family's sawmill back in 1947, they never could have imagined the disaster currently facing the forests of the Commonwealth. Rather than carefully managed woodlands whose skillful maintenance will provide areas of recreation and relaxation, generate revenue for the Commonwealth, and drastically reduce an ever-growing threat of uncontrollable forest fires, the Commonwealth has chosen to rescind management practices on 185,000 acres of state woodlands, consigning them, possibly quite literally, to the fires of hell.

The Manomet Study is a good starting point for the discussion of biomass viability. However, the scope of the study is limited – the study itself readily admits, in its opening statements, that non-forest biomass was not considered as an essential element of this study. Yet non-forest biomass is a readily available resource which is already being produced – by sawmills, by landscapers, by tree service technicians and even private landowners cutting down firewood for their personal use. Why not utilize what we already produce?

Beyond this difference in calculation, there is another factor which should be addressed – the idea that coal is cleaner than biomass. No, coal is not cleaner than biomass. The Study does not factor in the char/ash which is burnt and spread back into the ground. Additionally, a project I'm personally working on involves the addition of a hydroponic greenhouse which would utilize both heat and emissions from the gasification unit being installed at my mill early next year. Another company I'm in contact with is extracting nitrogen from gasification emissions for the production of fertilizer. These projects encompass ideas for emissions usage which were never included in the Manomet Study – nor were they intended to be.

Because of the Commonwealth's reaction to this study, 185,000 acres of Massachusetts forestland are will now go unmanaged. This is a sick sign for the state, as more money will have to be diverted from other worthwhile projects to ensure fire management practices are accomplished. If woodlands are not harvested, the fireload increases. If the fireload is not regulated, then Massachusetts will soon rival California or even Russia for char and smoke content.

Coupled with this need for fire management funding is the lack of funds which would have been generated from carbon credits. Millions of dollars of federal funding will be lost because of the Commonwealth's interpretation – and singular consideration—of a study which should have been the basis for further studies, not the be-all and end-all of the biomass debate. The Manomet team realized the limitations of their study, and I don't think they intended the response – nor the interpretation – that has come from their findings.

As a side note, it concerns me that our government, at both state and federal levels, keeps pushing the need to create jobs – yet doesn't seem to want to preserve jobs that are already in place. Forest management, and especially harvesting, have both primary and secondary economic effects. Primary effects include the obvious – foresters, loggers, sawmill employees, and the transporters of logs and lumber. Secondary effects range from vehicle and machinery mechanics to the grocery stores and gas station attendants who rely on their business.

I worry for a government who would take the findings, the report, the *advice*, of any one study – and base their entire theorem on that study, regardless of the impact on the community it professes to serve. Yes, a study can carry weight. Yes, a study can have merit. But it should not be the “final answer” for a question that, without further research, has no definitive answer. I hope that the powers-that-be rethink this decision and ultimately lift the ban they have imposed on those many thousands of acres of forestland – before it’s too late, and we lose them to infestation, overgrowth, or even worse, wild fire.

Respectfully,

Lenny

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